

Killtown

Questioning the 9/11 attacks...

FEBRUARY 10, 2006

9/11 Rescuer Saw Explosions Inside WTC 6 Lobby

In an exclusive Killtown interview, Ground Zero EMT Patricia Ondrovic talks about her harrowing day at the WTC on 9/11. Within minutes after the South Tower collapses, she witnessed the WTC 5 blowing up, cars exploding, and explosions inside the lobby of the WTC 6, all the while narrowly escaping with her own life.



Arriving at the Scene

Killtown: Were you one of the Ground Zero rescuers on 9/11?

Patricia Ondrovic: Yes.

KT: What was your position and who did you work for?

PO: I was an emergency medical technician [EMT] with the [Fire Department of New York](#).

KT: How did your day start off on Sept. 11 and when did you get called to the scene at the WTC?

PO: It started off like any other. I had dropped a patient off at [Bellevue](#) and one of the Doc's asked if I was going to respond to the WTC. I told him it was out of my area. I asked "why, what's going on?" He told me they were getting reports that "a helicopter" had crashed into one of the towers. I responded after both planes had hit. I was on scene approx 45 min before the first tower fell.

[The 2nd crash happened at approx 9:03 a.m. and the South tower fell at approx 9:59 a.m.]

KT: Was the WTC area part of your regular route?

PO: No, I worked in the [Times Square area](#). The WTC was far downtown from where I was.

KT: What did you immediately do once you arrived at the scene and do you remember where exactly you arrived at?

PO: I reported to a staging officer who told me to park the ambulance along [Vesey Street](#). I ended up parking along the street in front of the 6 World Trade with several other ambulances. We were going to get any injured people who were brought out of the burning buildings to transport to the hospital. I don't remember where we entered from as I was not so familiar with the area.



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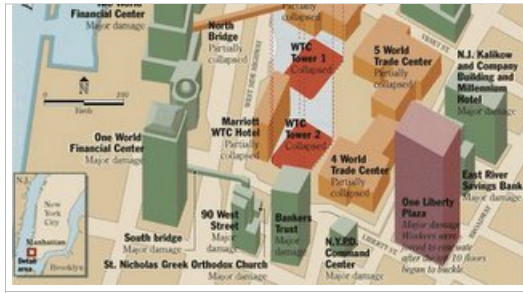
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([Map source](#))

Another Airplane Warning

KT: Did you basically stay around that area before the South Tower collapsed at 9:59 am?

PO: Yes, we were staged waiting for the triage teams to bring us patients when an officer in a white shirt and blue pants (don't know from what agency) said that there was a radio transmission that stated, "Another plane was headed towards us!" We were told to get to our vehicles and get ready to move fast, but it wasn't fast enough. All of a sudden there was a lot of activity within the several agencies there and everyone started to scramble to ready their respective vehicles.

KT: When you were told another aircraft was approaching, was this right before the South Tower collapsed?

PO: Maybe 3 to 5 minutes prior. I don't know if that estimation is correct, but I remember we all had time to take a minute and look into the skies all around to see if we could see anything.

KT: Did you see any planes in the sky?

PO: No, there was nothing in the skies at that time.

KT: Did you happen to see any helicopters, military or non-military, flying around?

PO: I didn't see any helicopters at the time either.

KT: Where did they want you to move your vehicles to, any particular spot, or just "away" from the WTC?

PO: "Just get ready to move fast" is the phrase I remember.

KT: Did they want you to move away from the area right away, or just get ready to move if another plane was coming in?

PO: I don't know, they just told us to get our equipment, put it back in the vehicles and "get ready to move...fast". At that point, they seemed to realize it just wasn't a safe place to be.

KT: In retrospect, did it seem a little too coincidental that they told all of the rescuers to get ready to move out of the area minutes before the Tower collapsed?

PO: It was a bit eerie at the time as well. In that job, when someone tells you to "just move fast" there's nothing to question, you just move. We had been on scene for a while before just setting up and waiting for patients and all of a sudden there was so much activity. It did seem odd that after being there for some time all of a sudden everyone had to get ready to get out. I personally never expected the buildings to come down.

KT: Did you receive any direct warnings or hear any rumors that any of the towers might be coming down?

PO: We were not told the building was possibly going to collapse. I did not hear any rumors about a building collapse. I never heard anyone say

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anything to the effect that any of the buildings in the area were not stable at the time. We were simply told to get to our vehicles and get ready to move.

KT: Was Vesey Street blocked off between Church St and West St?

PO: Yes, I think all that were there were fire, police, EMS, and OEM [Office Emergency Management].

KT: Did you ever see any videos or cameras being confiscated from anyone that day?

PO: No.

KT: Did you see any newscasters or any other media people on or near Vesey taking any footage?

PO: No, none that I could see.

Cars Blowing Up

KT: What did you do when the South Tower started coming down?

PO: I didn't know what was happening, but there was a loud "roar" -- lots of crashing sounds. I was attempting to put my stretcher back into the vehicle. The ground was shaking and I saw a sea of people, mostly the various agencies on scene, Fire, Police, EMS, all running towards me. I had no idea what they were running from, but I decided I'd be ahead of them and just started running west towards the river. As I was running, parked cars were blowing up and some were on fire, the street was cracking a bit as well. Very shortly after I started running, everything became one big black cloud. I was near the West Side Highway and I couldn't see around me anymore.

KT: Before you heard the loud rumbling which was the South Tower coming down, do you remember hearing any strange noises like gunfire or crackling sounds?

PO: No.

KT: You talked about the cars blowing up in your [WTC Task Force interview](#), correct?

PO: Yes.

KT: Can you estimate how many vehicles blew up around you?

PO: At least three and some were on fire as I was running by. I was still on the south side of Vesey running west. The burning cars were between my ambulance and about the middle of the 6 World Trade where the lobby doors were at.

KT: Where you running on the street, or up the sidewalk?

PO: Up the sidewalk.

KT: When these vehicles blew up, was it kind of like what you would see in the movies where the vehicle pops up in the air when it explodes with a fireball coming out?

PO: I remember parts flying off -- I think I got hit with a car door. I remember they were also on fire, but I don't specifically recall the movie type fireball, but there was a loud bang as the door flew off the one car I was running past.

KT: Do you have any idea what was causing these vehicles to catch on fire and/or explode? Was the air temperature really hot as you were running by these cars?

PO: I don't know what was causing them to blow up. I didn't know at the time that I was trying to outrun a skyscraper falling on me, but after I found out what I ran from. I figured it was the impact of the

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building falling and residual effect. I am not an engineer, so I can only guess at a probable cause. I don't remember feeling any extreme heat.

KT: Could you tell if the vehicles blowing up on the street were only parked next to the WTC 6?

PO: I was only paying attention to my immediate surroundings, if there were any vehicles not near me blowing up, I wasn't aware of them, just the ones closest to me.

KT: What type of vehicles were they (cars, SUVs, trucks -- civilian, non-civilian) that were on fire or had blown up?

PO: They were unmarked cars, most likely privately owned. I didn't see any SUVs, trucks or any "official" vehicles on fire.

KT: Were these cars all parked next to each other?

PO: They were parallel parked. There was no discernable order to what was on fire. It was all very chaotic.

Explosions Inside WTC 6 Lobby

KT: You mentioned you were running west on Vesey Street, what happened after that?

PO: I just kept running. I was aware there were other people running as well. After passing the cars on fire, I was trying to find someplace safe. I tried to run into the lobby of 6 World Trade, but there were federal police -- maybe 4 to 6 of them -- standing in the open doorways. As I tried to run in, they wouldn't let me, waving me out, telling me "you can't come in here, keep running." As I turned to start running west again, I saw a series of flashes around the ceiling of the lobby all going off one-by-one like the X-mass lights that "chase" in pattern. I think I started running faster at that point.

KT: Did you hear any "popping" sounds when each of these flashes in the WTC 6 lobby were going off?

PO: Yes, that part was like a movie. The pops were at the same time as the flashes.

KT: Can you estimate either how many flashes you saw or how many of these "pops" you heard inside this lobby?

PO: At least 6 before I was turned away.

KT: Could you still hear any of these explosions when you turned to run back out, or was the noise outside too loud?

PO: I don't recall hearing any more when I resumed running. It was very chaotic.

KT: Now to be clear, were you inside the Lobby of the WTC 6, or were you outside the building when you witnessed these what appeared to be explosions?

PO: I was in the doorway, but not inside the lobby. I remember being able to breathe the somewhat cleaner air coming from inside the building. They stopped me as I was trying to get past the threshold.

KT: Were the explosions going off as you were entering the lobby area, or did they seem to start going off after the police tried to turn you away?

PO: It all happened at the same time. As I got to the doorway, I was told not to come in. As the officer was telling me I couldn't get in the building the flashes starting going off.

KT: Where the police just right at the lobby door, or were some also way inside the building?

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PO: There were probably 4-5 officers in the doorway. I could see a few others back in the lobby area.

KT: You said you saw "federal police." What exactly do you mean and did you find it strange they were in there and that they wouldn't let you in?

PO: Well, they were in light brown uniforms and "Smokey the bear" hats. I assumed they were federal police because NYC police don't look like that and I knew there was a lot of federal offices in the WTC as well as the surrounding area, so it wasn't strange to me to see them there, but I did find it very odd that they wouldn't let me in to get cover. But like I say, in that profession, someone tells you to go an opposite way you are going, you don't ask, you just go. I remember hoping they got out as I was watching whatever the small explosions were, because they stayed in the building. They weren't locking it up after evacuating or anything like that.

KT: Did you know which government agencies were in the WTC?

PO: I knew there were a lot of federal agencies in the WTC complex, but I don't know which ones specifically.

KT: Did these policemen run out of the WTC 6 lobby after these explosions occurred, or could you tell?

PO: It didn't look like they did. It looked like they were there making sure no one ran in like I tried to do. I remember seeing them in the doorway, but don't know what happened to them after that.

KT: Did you happen to notice if they were wearing any earplugs or any other uncommon protective gear?

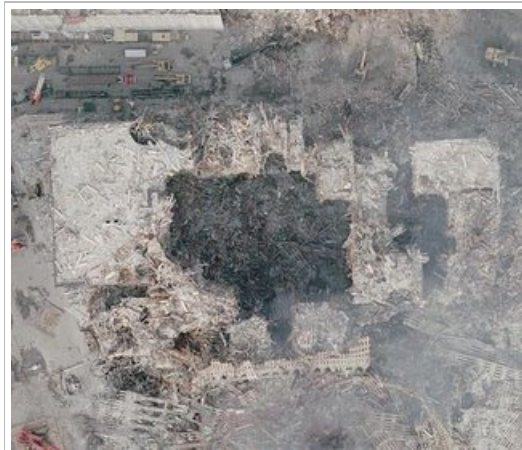
PO: There was nothing that I could see. They appeared to be dressed to simply do lobby detail. No flack wear, no overcoats, no helmets. To this day, I still wonder if they got out.

KT: Did you think these explosions in the lobby were maybe lights popping out as in an electrical surge, or did they seem more like explosives going off in a timed manner?

PO: I immediately got the impression they were timed explosives. I have never thought they were anything else, not then, not now.

KT: Have you ever seen a building being demolished with explosives on TV and was the flashes and pops similar to that?

PO: It did remind me of just that. I had seen something on a Las Vegas casino being demolished and that's what it reminded me of.



Aerial view of the WTC 6 after 9/11. (Photo source: noaa.gov)

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KT: Can you try to describe what these "pops" you heard sounded like?

PO: They sounded like light bulbs popping, but there were no light fixtures where the explosions were coming from. The sound was not all that loud.

KT: Do you think these explosions you witnessed were loud enough to be heard on the street?

PO: Because of everything going on, I don't think these "pops" could have been heard from the street. It was definitely louder outside as a whole.

KT: At the time, who did you think planted these explosives in there?

PO: I didn't have any notions of where to put blame per se, but I remember thinking that it was possibly the same organization who tried to blow up the building [back in 1993](#). I figured they came back to finish the job. At the time I was running, I remember thinking that "they" wired the whole area. At the time I wasn't aware that what made the towers catch fire were passenger jets crashing. I thought the buildings had bombs planted to go off that day. The idea of not only one passenger jet, but two took me a while to comprehend -- not to mention the pentagon as well.

KT: Can you estimate how long after you heard the loud rumbling, which was the South Tower coming down, to when you witnessed these explosives going off in the WTC 6?

PO: Well, remember this was all on the same street I was parked. It is very difficult for me to estimate time with so much happening at once, but I want to say maybe 2 to 3 minutes from the rumbling and the ground, and the cars, and the fires, that I tried to run into 6 WTC for cover, which is when I saw those explosions.

KT: Did anybody else besides you and the police witness these explosions in the WTC 6 lobby?

PO: I imagine there must have been others to see, I wasn't the only one running up the street. I can't imagine being the only person to try to run for cover. I didn't see any "civilians" in the lobby of the 6, just the brown uniformed officers.

Motorola Radio Troubles

KT: After you witnessed the explosions in the lobby of the WTC 6, you started running in which direction and then what happened?

PO: I kept running west on Vesey. I got hit with the cloud shortly after being turned away from 6 WTC. I was probably at the corner of Vesey/West Street at that point running. I ran towards the West Side Highway -- there is a park area there. I remember running across grass and there was now lots of grey and black smoke. I was just trying to get to the water because nothing was exploding, or on fire from what I could see. There were lots and lots of people also running that way at this point.

KT: When were you able to escape the dust cloud and what happened after that?

PO: I was now at the water's edge. There were no boats I could see, so I started to run north along the side of the West Side Highway. I was about 9 or 10 blocks north of Vesey on the West Side Highway. I found the first FDNY EMS vehicle and knew the crew as they were also from my station. I remember not being able to breathe so well -- felt like someone was standing on my chest. When I looked back, I could see people coming out of the black cloud and continuing to run and walk north on the West Side Highway as well.

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KT: Did you notice any firefighters or other rescuers having technical problems with their Motorola radios or any other equipment?

PO: Oh yeah, at one point there was a loud "buzzing" sound and none of the EMS radios worked for maybe 30 seconds? We all used Motorola radios and I believe our repeaters were on top of the towers, so when the tower came down our radios failed. I tried to use my cellphone, but that too did not work.

KT: Do you know if anybody's cellphone worked and were able to get through to anybody?

PO: A few of my co workers had Nextel phones. Theirs worked, but they couldn't talk to anyone who didn't have a Nextel because all the other services were out at the time.

KT: When did you get to leave the area to go home?

PO: I left by ambulance. A FDNY EMS supervisor came up to myself and my colleagues and told us to "go back in." I still wasn't aware of what I had come out of and I told him anyone who didn't get out isn't getting out and it's not safe to go back in. He yelled at me, demanding all 3 of us "go back in." I told him I was having chest pain and trouble breathing and my colleagues took me to St. Vincent's Hospital. I was on the stretcher with an oxygen mask on looking out the back windows as we were driving off and saw the other tower collapse. It didn't occur to me at the time that the other one was already gone and that's what I came out of. I don't remember when I got home. I had to walk over the Queensboro Bridge and it was dark out. I walked home from my station at Bellevue. I lived in Astoria, Queens at the time. All I wanted to do was get home and see my cats.

Bag & Tag at Ground Zero

KT: In the days after, did you have to go back at Ground Zero?

PO: Yes, I think my first day back was maybe 3 days later.

KT: What were your duties when you had to go back?

PO: We all took turns doing morgue detail, standby for anyone who got hurt going through the rubble. I did morgue detail a few times.

KT: Is this what is referred to as "bag & tag"?

PO: Yes, when you have to log any body parts, or personal effects in morgue work. It was important to try to document any remains we found.

KT: Now despite this being probably the most chaotic incident you had to work at, did you find any strange things when you're recovering evidence there?

PO: Well, I remember cataloging findings in the morgue log -- a tooth, an arm and such. Never catalogued watches, wallets or jewelry.

KT: You never found any jewelry on any of the victim's parts?

PO: I didn't, no. But I do recall at some point either in Brooklyn or Staten Island they had a facility where debris was trucked to and the contents sifted by hand for any evidence. That was some time after 9/11, maybe a few weeks after they started that.

KT: Did you find any personal belongings on the ground or buried under any debris?

PO: I didn't.

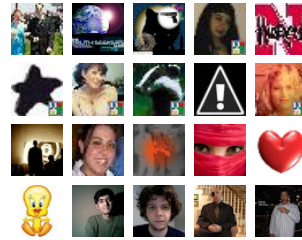
KT: What about things like office furniture, computers, and pictures -- things that would be in a normal office building?

PO: Everything was this sort of grey/black debris. I personally never

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Inside Job Counter

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saw anything definable like a chair, desk, or phone, but I never went into what was the base of the building itself, there could have been there. I remember everything being layered in grey soot and ashes everywhere and just debris. One thing I remember distinctly was on a corner adjacent to the towers a bike messenger's bicycle still chained to the lamppost covered in soot.

KT: Have you ever worked a recover detail where you didn't find any recognizable personal belongings or objects like interior furniture, say from the aftermath of a fire?

PO: I never worked a recovery detail before that. It wasn't customary for EMS to work recovery. From time to time we would have to transport a body to the morgue after an investigation was completed if the deceased was in public view. I worked in midtown. In the 12 years I was with EMS, I never responded to anything like that.

KT: A year after the attacks, a victim's family received an ATM card that belonged to their son who was supposedly on Flight 11 that crashed into the North Tower and was supposedly found in relative pristine condition by rescue crews at Ground Zero. Did you ever come across anything even remotely close to someone's personal item like this in any condition?

PO: I never came across any personal effects. The things I did find were charred, burnt, rubble covered in soot. I guess that's the needle in the haystack [the ATM card].

KT: So is it fair to say that you think something like this plastic ATM could not only not survive at Ground Zero, but not survive so well intact?

PO: I'd say it was a miracle.

Aircraft Wreckage

KT: Did you ever see any aircraft wreckage lying around on or after 9/11 at Ground Zero.

PO: Not on 9/11, but a bit after one day I was doing standby and there was a long flatbed truck bringing out a long piece of silver and charred metal, probably the length of 2 passenger cars, that one of the police officers doing standby detail with us brought to my attention and he said it was a piece of the plane.

KT: Could you at all tell what part of the plane this piece of debris you saw on this truck came from and could you see any windows or other discernable markings?

PO: No, it had to be brought to my attention what it was. In fact, I forgot I saw that until you asked the question. It would have stuck in my memory if it was a wing, or seats or anything like that. It was a somewhat long and curved at the edges piece of what looked like fuselage. I didn't see any company markings on it either.

KT: You mentioned this piece was silver in color. Did any part of that piece of silver debris you saw have any of the "shiny silver" you would see on your average American Airlines plane?

PO: Not when I saw it. The entire piece was dull and charred silver, but it definitely looked like part of a plane.

KT: Did anybody you know of who was at the WTC on 9/11 or at Ground Zero afterwards see or find any airplane debris?

PO: Not that I'm aware of. No one mentioned anything like that to me.

WTC Task Force Interview

KT: You were interviewed by the WTC task force afterwards. Did anybody else interview you about your experience at ground zero?

PO: The WTC Task Force was the only group that ever interviewed or debriefed me. They asked me to detail the events that day as well as mark on a map where I was parked and which way I ran.

KT: Who were the people at the WTC Task Force that interviewed you?

PO: I was told one was from the F.B.I., one was from D.O.I. [Dept. of Investigations], one was P.D. I recall there were 4 to 5 people involved. They were writing as well as voice recording.

KT: Do you know why some of the lines on pages 9, 12, 13 of your Task Force interview were blacked out?

PO: No, I never received a copy of my interview and I never read it. All I did was the one interview with them.

KT: When these officials were debriefing you, was this a normal routine after an incident?

PO: I had been on other calls that I was debriefed after (not many) and usually it was an EMS supervisor with P.D. if it was a crime scene, or if I had witnessed a crime, or incident in progress.

KT: Was your interview with the WTC Task Force more of a normal debriefing, or did you feel like you were being interrogated?

PO: I felt as if they were trying to pick apart every minute detail from every possible angle.

KT: Did you find that odd, especially having to trace your movements on a map?

PO: It was a crime scene, so much was lost. I figured they still had to recover equipment and needed to document. I think I was still a bit shell shocked to really consider it. There were so many things that were odd then, nothing was normal.

KT: Did you mention the flashes and explosions going off in the lobby of the WTC 6 to them?

PO: Yes, I did. I remember describing what looked like depth charges going off in the building I tried to run into, but I don't see it in the transcript of my interview.

KT: Did they ask you any follow-up questions about these explosions?

PO: No, they asked me to describe the events as I have described them to you here. I don't recall them asking any follow up questions. They simply took notes all the way through. The only specific questions I remember being asked was in regards to mapping out where my vehicle was and which way I ran.

WTC 5 Blowing Up

KT: On the Task Force interview, you said "I was still on Vesey, cause the building that blew up on me was on Vesey." Which building were you referring to?

PO: I don't know, but that is all WTC property. I'm not sure if that was 6 or just a part of the WTC complex.

KT: When you said the building "blew up" on you, are you talking about the explosions you saw in the WTC 6 lobby?

PO: No, this was directly behind my vehicle as I was trying to put the stretcher back in. I don't know if that was part of 6 though. I ran from what was blowing up and that's when I tried to run into the lobby of 6. The vehicles were parked backed up to the curb, not parallel parked, so the back doors of the ambulance were facing the building [WTC 6] on

the south side of Vesey.

KT: Do you feel that it was either the WTC 5 or 6 that was blowing up?

PO: Yes.

KT: Was this before the cars started catching on fire and blowing up, or about at the same time?

PO: All at the same time. Everything happened very quickly. I couldn't say which came first.

KT: You mentioned in that interview that you thought one of the lobbies of the building behind you is what blew out. Was this the lobby of WTC 5 or 6?

PO: I'm not sure, but it was probably 5 because 6 was west of me and that's the lobby I tried to run into.

KT: Can you describe more about how the building blew up on you? Did you feel the shock wave from the explosion and/or debris falling down near you?

PO: Well, one second I was trying to put my stretcher into the ambulance, the next thing I know I am thrown to the ground as the ground was shaking. Debris was flying at me from where the building I was parked in front of. There was a continual loud rumbling, there was just debris flying from every direction and then everything being covered in the black and gray smoke.

KT: Let's recap real quickly; your ambulance was parked backed up against the WTC 6, near the 6's corner by the alleyway between the WTC 5 and 6. When you were trying to put your stretcher back in, you were knocked down to the ground by an explosion that you thought came from the lobby of WTC 5. When you got back up, you started running west up the sidewalk on Vesey St towards West Side Hwy and then these cars parked along the street started blowing up as you ran by and that's when you tried to duck into the WTC 6 lobby for cover, but these policemen inside were preventing you from coming in and that's when you saw the explosions inside the lobby of WTC 6?

PO: Yes.

KT: Did anybody else you know concur with you that either the WTC 5 or 6 was blowing up at the same time you heard the rumbling of the South Tower collapsing?

PO: No, it never came up in discussion.

KT: After the attacks when things were starting to settle down for you and after the government and media was telling us what had all happened, did you ever look back and think what were all those explosions from the WTC 5 and 6 you witnessed were all about and why there was never any official mention of them?

PO: No, I didn't watch the news. I was a bit shell shocked to say the least. In fact the very first time I have revisited that day was when I found your site.

WTC 7

KT: You mentioned you left the WTC area before the North Tower collapsed. When did you hear about the WTC 7 collapsing, in which you were parked across the street from on 9/11?

PO: When I stumbled onto your site 3 weeks ago.

KT: Did that surprise you that you never heard about the WTC 7 collapsing afterwards?

PO: Actually, it did. It confused me somewhat because I don't

remember seeing anything on the news about it, or even knowing it was in any type of unstable condition.

KT: So you weren't aware that another building had collapse (which was WTC 7) when you returned to Ground Zero for morgue detail?

PO: No I wasn't. There was so much debris and wreckage I couldn't tell what was what anymore.

KT: When you were on the scene on Vesey St that whole time, did you happen to notice any commotion, or anything strange going on near the WTC 7?

PO: No.

Colleagues Lost

KT: Were you ever invited to the 9/11 Commission hearings?

PO: No.

KT: Were you ever gagged by anybody from talking about anything related to 9/11?

PO: No, I wasn't.

KT: Are you concerned that you might loose your job by speaking out on these issues?

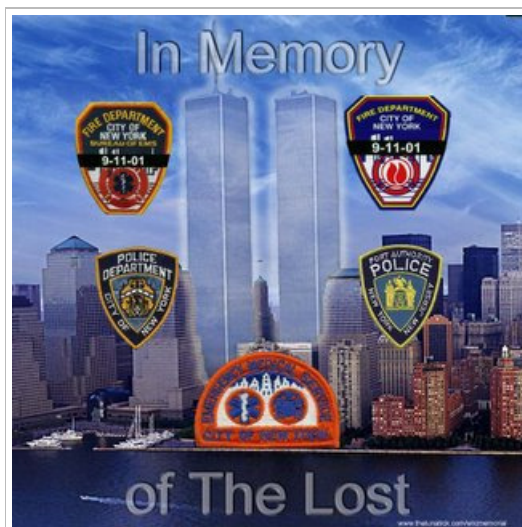
PO: No, not at this time.

KT: Have you suffered any health effects from working down at Ground Zero?

PO: I broke a couple of ribs, but didn't realize it till 3 days later. I had, like most of my colleagues, the "WTC cough" for several months. It was an extremely annoying dry hack that didn't produce anything, but acted more like "spasms" rather than a cough. You'd get woken up in the middle of the night with this cough that sometimes would have you near passing out and unable to catch your breath. Over time it has dissipated, thanks gods.

KT: Did you lose any colleagues at Ground Zero?

PO: I stopped counting at 60.



See also:

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